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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Permanent members of Security Council stress high political importance of solving United Nations financial problems; say full and punctual payment of contributions is crucial for success of peace-keeping operations.

* Secretary-General welcomes signing of latest agreement by Israel and PLO as another important step towards full implementation of Declaration of Principles.

* United Nations should have stronger role in economic and social fields as poverty poses long-term threat to peace, Sweden tells General Assembly.

* North Korean nuclear issue remains paramount security concern for region and for world, Republic of Korea states.

* Ukraine appeals for more international assistance to close down Chernobyl nuclear plant and mitigate effects of 1986 disaster.

* Ecuador says drug production, consumption and trafficking are devastating traditional social structures; highlights growing problem of corruption.

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Finding a solution to the financial problems affecting the United Nations is a matter of high political importance, according to the Foreign Ministers of the five permanent members of the Security Council. In a statement issued after a meeting with the Secretary-General yesterday, they stressed the need for a sound and fair, and therefore stable, financial basis for the Organization, enabling it to perform its mandates. The Foreign Ministers of China, France, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom participated in the meeting. The Secretary of State of the United States was represented by the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

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The proper functioning of the United Nations depended on the resources Member States put at its disposal, notably by full and punctual payment of financial contributions, the Ministers pointed out. That was crucial for the success of peace-keeping operations. They also noted the efforts of the High-Level Working Group on the financial situation of the Organization, stressing the need for the urgent adoption of concrete measures to prevent further deterioration of the situation and to increase cost effectiveness. In that regard, they noted the importance of a scale of assessment which would reflect the principle of capacity to pay as precisely as possible.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today welcomed the signing in Washington D.C. of the latest agreement between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). He applauded the leaders of Israel and the PLO and their negotiating teams, whose resolve and dedication to peace had resulted in another important step towards the full implementation of the Declaration of Principles.

The Secretary-General expressed the hope that the agreement would encourage progress in the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of the Middle East peace process, leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). He stressed that the United Nations was firmly committed to supporting the peace process, and would continue to provide all possible expertise and assistance in the field of economic and social development.

Meanwhile, United Nations Special Coordinator Terje Roed Larsen today appealed to international donors to help ensure the success of the agreement and the peace process. Speaking in Gaza, he said it was essential that they mobilize to assist the Palestinians. "If the development effort fails, the peace process will also fail," he warned.

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Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen today called for a stronger and better defined role for the United Nations in the economic and social fields. In an address to the General Assembly, she said poverty and social misery were the greatest long-term threats to international peace and security. She called for a clearer division of work in development assistance, as well as better coordination, more distinct priorities and more effective management by development agencies. As one of the largest voluntary contributors to United Nations economic and social efforts, Sweden urged other donors to assume their responsibilities to the same degree.

Regarding the United Nations financial crisis, the Foreign Minister stressed that unilateral withholding of contributions could not be justified. While countries demanded more from the Organization, some of them were not

willing to pay their dues, apparently wanting others to foot the bill. The United Nations needed revised scales of assessment to better reflect Members' ability to pay. She went on to say that multilateral cooperation was the most important instrument for mastering the crucial issues of survival.

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The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea, Gong Ro-Myung, today said the North Korean nuclear issue remained a paramount security concern for North-East Asia and the world. He urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea not only to comply fully with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards regime, but also to faithfully implement the Geneva Framework agreed to in October 1994. In addition, he called on the Democratic People's Republic to live up to its commitments and obligations under the Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Foreign Minister Gong also expressed concern over the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic, urging its Government to protect rights by opening its society. He called on the United Nations to do its part to reunite families divided during and after the Korean war. He reaffirmed his country's decision to take part in the United Nations stand-by system, and its willingness to provide some 800 soldiers for that effort, including an infantry battalion, engineering and medical units, and military observers. Hostile acts against United Nations personnel were unacceptable and should not go unpunished, he added.

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Foreign Minister Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine today appealed for increased international assistance to close down the Chernobyl nuclear station by the year 2000 and to mitigate the effects of the 1986 disaster. "The earlier we invest money in the solution of this problem, the sooner, and with less negative consequences for the whole of humanity, we shall be able to overcome it," he told the General Assembly. He added that Ukraine would welcome wide international participation in the establishment of an international scientific-technological centre in Chernobyl.

Ukraine's full participation in United Nations activities was impeded by "excessive contribution and existing debt for financing UN peace-keeping operations," the Foreign Minister went on to say. The country could no longer be held hostage by the Organization's financial problems, given its own difficult economic situation during transition and the negative impact of compliance with economic sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Ukraine had to concentrate its resources on implementing its decisions to renounce nuclear weapons and to decommission the Chenobyl power plant.

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As social conditions deteriorate in many regions of the world, corruption has become an endemic disease, the Foreign Minister of Ecuador, Galo Leoro-Franco, told the Assembly today. He said the production, consumption and trafficking of narcotic drugs were devastating traditional social structures. Violence was on the rise and the brutal methods frequently used to suppress it were counter-productive. In his capacity as Secretary pro-tempore of the Rio Group, he called for the convening of a second international conference on narcotic drugs to examine mechanisms for use in the worldwide fight against drugs.

Turning to the United Nations, the Foreign Minister said the Security Council should be restructured so as to reflect the current membership of the Organization and the new international world order. Restructuring should not be limited to the inclusion of two major industrial powers as permanent members, but should result in appropriate representation for all geographical regions. The veto privilege should not be extended to new members, he continued. Those members who currently possessed that privilege should restrict its use to issues related to Chapter VII of the Charter.

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